

242 Lincoln Lane
Hamilton, MT 59840
May 23, 2008

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Ravalli County Commissioners

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Ravalli County Commissioners
Ravalli County Planning Department
215 S. 4th Street
Hamilton, MT 59840

Dear Ravalli County Commissioners and Planning Department:

We are writing to express our dismay with - and opposition to - Draft Two of the proposed planning regulations. We have lived southeast of Hamilton on Lincoln Lane for the past 28 years.

During our tenure, we have used our ten acres carefully and intensively for agricultural purposes, and the land has carried an agricultural designation since the Bitterroot Valley was settled. Over the years, we've raised cattle, rabbits, chickens, and goats and pastured our mules and horses. We've sold our excess animals, milk, hay, and eggs produced on our acreage, and we've trained draft horses and mules for people from all over the United States. Our fields, used for hay and pasture, are exactly what you profess to desire - agricultural open space. We have always qualified for Greenbelt status and agricultural tax status.

Now the proposed zoning map has changed our classification to low density residential (one residence per acre) - essentially rendering our ten acres and home worthless for resale purposes - and destroying 28 years of sweat equity. We have been good and careful stewards of our land, and it has provided us with a large part of our livelihood. Now, if Draft Two is adopted, we will lose the ability to sell the land at its highest and best value, as a ten-acre (or two five-acre) agricultural unit. Who will want barns and outbuildings that cannot be used - or ten acres of lawn? We predict an enormous knapweed patch.

While we can continue to farm our land as long as we are able (grandfathering), under the new regulations we cannot sell it to someone who wants to continue using the land for agricultural endeavors. Because of ground water issues, the land cannot be subdivided into smaller lots until Hamilton City water and sewer are available - which will be long after we are dead.

Under this LDR designation, if we had a fire in the modular home in which we live, we could not replace it. If a fire or wind destroyed more than 50% of our barns or outbuildings, we could not rebuild them. Most other residents in our neighborhood also conduct similar intensive, small-scale agriculture operations, from a horse or two in their pastures or raising a beef a year for the freezer to small gardens and orchards.

Greatly increased taxation based on a change in the land-use classification is also frightening and, at this point, unknown. When will the fiscal impact of these changes be made known to Ravalli County taxpayers?

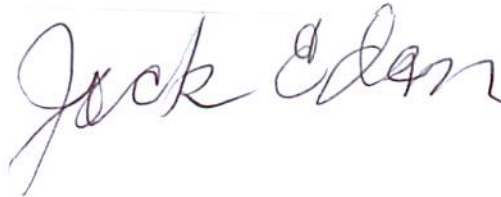
Cookie-cutter zoning designations from an out-of-state consulting company that knows nothing about how Bitterrooters live and make a living will not meet the needs of ordinary county residents. We sincerely doubt that anyone from Clarion or the Hamilton CPC ever bothered to drive Grantsdale Road and its tributaries before establishing the draft zones.

Yes, we are reasonably close to Hamilton. Yes there are a number of trophy homes and high-dollar subdivisions north of our area. But there are an equal or greater number of *intensive* agriculturists, such as we are, and our needs and concerns need to be dealt with equitably.

Sincerely,

Helen Eden

Jack and Helen Eden

Jack Eden

Copies to:

Dan Huls, Ravalli County Right to Farm and Ranch Board

Ravalli County Legislators

Candidates for Ravalli County Commissioner and State Legislative Positions